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University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension

Committed to Excellence

Helping Nebraskans enhance their lives and livelihoods is what University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension is all about. Each year, our science-based educational programs reach 400,000 Nebraskans from virtually every walk of life and in every county.

Land-grant university research is the foundation of Cooperative Extension's programs. Researchers in the University of Nebraska's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources conduct innovative basic and applied research to help Nebraskans solve problems, cope with rapid changes and make the most of opportunities. Extension incorporates research findings by IANR scientists and their colleagues nationwide into educational programs tailored to Nebraska's needs. We deliver our programs statewide to help address the state's economic, social and environmental needs. And we continually assess our offerings to assure they are relevant, user-friendly and effective.

This issue of Committed to Excellence highlights some of the ways Cooperative Extension's science-based educational programs are making a difference in Nebraskans' lives and livelihoods. Here are a few examples:

- Ranchers in Nebraska and other states are sharpening their management skills without leaving home through NU Cooperative Extension's beef home study courses. More than 4,000 producers from 40 states have taken the courses since they began in 1993. Participants say they reduced costs an average of \$15 per head after taking the course.
- Over 65,000 Nebraska families have learned food budgeting, food safety and food preparation skills through participation in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) during the program's 30 years of existence.
- NU Cooperative Extension partners with the private sector, government and local groups on the Nebraska EDGE program, which helps rural entrepreneurs start and expand small businesses. Since the program was launched in 1993, EDGE participants have created more than 450 full-time jobs.
- A statewide pesticide container recycling program spearheaded by Cooperative Extension recycled 49 tons of plastic containers in 1998. Pesticide container recycling eliminates storage and disposal problems and helps protect the environment while the plastic is recycled into new products.

Our programs provide Nebraskans the knowledge, skills and know-how to help them improve their communities, families and businesses while protecting the environment. This publication highlights only a few of our educational programs for farmers, ranchers, agribusinesses, families, consultants, home owners and communities. If you would like more information, contact your local extension office or visit our World Wide Web page at:

<http://www.ianr.unl.edu/ianr/coopext/coopext.htm>

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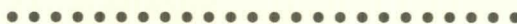
Agricultural Profitability and Sustainability

•Crop consultants are increasingly advising producers on field management. A series of summer field diagnostic clinics and winter workshops provide in-depth training on integrated pest management, soil fertility, crop production, irrigation, technology and other management issues. In 1998, nine summer clinics drew 502 agribusiness professionals from Nebraska and six other states. Three of these clinics were exclusively for industry representatives. The crop consultants, agribusiness professionals and producers who attended the clinics make decisions affecting 35 percent or more than 5 million of the state's row crop acres. They estimated the value of participating in the clinics at \$10.51 per acre managed. That equates to \$53.6 million of value to participants or their clients. Participants say they were impressed with the workshop presenters' professionalism and knowledge. One called the clinic "a thousand times better" than others because of the hands-on field activities.

•Farmers and agribusiness professionals are fine-tuning management techniques and gaining access to cutting-edge technologies such as the Internet and precision farming in The Nebraska Soybean and Feed Grains Profitability Project (NSFGPP). The project helps producers maximize profits through applied on-farm research, marketing groups, educational programs and enterprise record analyses. Cooperative Extension educators and specialists currently work with 34 Nebraska farmers

and 12 agribusiness people, who make a three-year commitment. In the program's first nine years, the NSFGPP served 67 farmers and 14 agribusinesses. Farmers and consultants currently involved in the project are responsible for more than 205,000 cropland acres. Participating farmers estimated they've each improved profits by more than \$7,000 annually for a total of \$245,000. Agribusiness participants estimate an average annual benefit of \$1,375 each.

•Many pork producers are struggling amid swine industry changes and low prices, making the latest management information critical. Nebraska pork producers have easy access to such information and resources through Pork Central, a "one-stop shop" for swine producer information, which includes a toll-free number, a World Wide Web site and a resources database. Through late 1998, more than 1,700 producers, most of them farrow-to-finish operators, called Pork Central; the web site had more than 2,300 visits. In a 1998 survey, Pork Central users said the service helped them learn more about the business, become more competitive and make more informed decisions. Nearly 20 percent of 344 respondents said Pork Central helped increase their profitability. One producer reported cutting feed costs \$8,000 in 1997 by following Pork Central recommendations. About 41 percent of the veterinarians, agribusiness professionals and others who advise pork producers say they regularly use Pork Central information to help customers.



Children, Youth and Families

•Some small Nebraska towns have identified better child care as essential to attracting or keeping employees near their communities. During 1998, Cooperative Extension and its local partners provided support for opening at least four child care centers to help meet the communities' needs for quality child care. More than half of Nebraska's licensed child-care providers participate annually in extension's child-care provider conferences, which help communities improve the quality of child care and the professionalism of child-care providers statewide and in neighboring states. In 1998 alone, the conferences reached more than 2,500 providers who care for more than 16,000 children, including more than 1,300 kids from limited-resource families. In addition, individuals and agencies from 33 states, Puerto Rico and Canada have received child-care training from an extension home-study course.

•Making science fun and relevant for students is often a challenge for teachers. Through the Nebraska

Empowering Youth Through Service Learning SERIES (Science Experiences and Resources for Informal Education Setting), more than 400 high school and middle school students served as science mentors and presented hands-on science lessons to elementary school students around the state. Hard science concepts are integrated into community service projects through this program. Some sparsely populated rural areas in Nebraska's northern Sandhills rely heavily on this cross-age teaching to support science education. In another project, 27 high school physics students created a hands-on, day-long exploration of space travel for younger students. Cooperative Extension, 4-H and VISTA collaborated on the project with 63 schools, 22 extension offices, 20 associations, 14 government agencies, 27 businesses, six community centers and six community groups.

•Character development is critical for fostering children's overall sense of well-being, recent studies

show. Character Counts!, a Nebraska 4-H program, helps children sort right from wrong and encourages them to use universally accepted values to strengthen their character. The national program, originally developed by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, teaches trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship as the six pillars of character. Age-appropriate games, role playing, discussions and examples make these

character concepts understandable. In the past two years, 1,900 Nebraska youths and adults have been trained to teach Character Counts! In 1998, 20,000 children received 15 hours of Character Counts! educational programming in their classrooms. The curriculum reached another 123,000 kids through one-time exposure at day camps, the Nebraska State Fair and civic groups.



Food Safety, Health and Wellness

•Nationwide, foodborne illness strikes between 6.5 million and 33 million Americans and causes as many as 9,000 deaths annually. The ServSafe program helps assure that the food served in restaurants, schools and nursing homes is as safe as possible. Since 1994, more than 4,000 food service managers throughout the state have been taught safe food handling procedures. ServSafe's success prompted new training for cooks and other staff, which began in 1998. Statewide, 95 percent of ServSafe participants passed a national certification test following training. Each ServSafe manager shared information with an estimated 15 fellow employees, multiplying the training's impact to over 60,000. State inspectors report that more food safety practices are used in food service establishments where managers have attended ServSafe. The Nebraska Department of Agriculture and the Nebraska Health and Human Services System collaborate on this project.

•As the nation's leader in beef cattle slaughter, bolstering consumer confidence in beef remains critical to Nebraska's economy, following ground beef recalls here in 1997. Equally crucial in an era of low cattle prices is improving cattle profitability along the entire food chain. Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) voluntary training helps beef producers focus on management skills and science-based production techniques to avoid defects, improve beef quality and safety, encourage high standards throughout the

industry and boost consumer confidence in beef. More than 3,000 Nebraska producers, who oversee more than 40 percent of the state's fed cattle, are BQA-certified. Under contracts signed with meat packers for 1999, packers will pay about \$16 more per head for BQA-certified cattle than for non-certified cattle. Demand for BQA-certified cattle has tripled in one year. In 1998, 16,000 head of Nebraska BQA-certified cattle were processed and sent to grocery stores. In 1999, 52,000 head of cattle are expected to be BQA-certified. At least 15 other states now use the BQA program developed in Nebraska.

•Helping Nebraska's meat and poultry processors ensure that their products are safe and that they meet new federally mandated standards is the goal of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) training. Extension specialists have presented workshops to more than 515 small- to medium-sized Nebraska firms and consulted with more than 140 companies to help them comply with the new federal regulations. Extension also is training extension educators, industry leaders and veterinarians to help farmers apply HACCP concepts on the farm and to help food service operators bring its principles into restaurants. U.S. Department of Agriculture officials have credited NU Cooperative Extension with helping several processors write HACCP plans that are in good order.



Strengthening Nebraska Communities

•Living in sparsely populated areas can leave some rural Nebraskans feeling out of the loop in today's high-speed, worldwide electronic communications. The Master Navigator program provides Internet training for rural Nebraskans. In return, participants agree to volunteer 30 hours of training

to others. The 24-hour training includes communicating via e-mail, creating World Wide Web pages and making a difference in communities. In 1997 and 1998, over 250 Nebraskans in 16 communities became Master Navigators and promised to provide at least 4,000 total volunteer hours helping their

communities and neighbors learn about and use the Internet. One Master Navigator logged 30 hours and wants to continue volunteering to help older Nebraskans overcome computer intimidation. Another volunteer developed a Web site for a local historical society. Local partners include libraries, community colleges, community information technology committees, county extension offices and chambers of commerce.

•Whether it's a large city, a rural town or a Native American tribe, community survival, success and strength hinge largely on community leadership and involvement. A committee of Native Americans

and Cooperative Extension leaders are developing a Family Community Leadership (FCL) Institute program that is tailored to the cultural, economic and social needs of the Native American community. Native Americans have been trained in communications, leadership, learning styles, team building, and how to work with boards, advisory groups and the media. As a result, they have become more actively involved in their tribes, schools and communities. FCL graduates run for and serve on tribal councils, school boards, county boards and numerous other positions.



Water Quality and Environment

•With more than 8 million irrigated acres, Nebraska is second only to California in irrigated agriculture. Efficient water use and application are critical to agricultural profitability and water quality protection. SPLASH, a one-on-one irrigation water management program in Nebraska's Central Platte Valley, helps irrigators reduce water, energy and fertilizer use. Cooperative Extension and Natural Resource Conservation Service staff educate producers about innovative irrigation technologies and tried-and-true irrigation best management practices. Since 1993, 93 farmers, who irrigate an average of 380 acres each, estimate they've reduced their annual pumping and irrigation costs an average of \$3,600 each, for a total of \$335,000. This covers an annual water savings of 46.4 million gallons. Program organizers also estimate SPLASH prevented about 630,000 pounds of nitrogen fertilizer from leaching into groundwater, saving an additional estimated \$88,200 and protecting the environment.

•Herbicide runoff from farm fields in the Blue River Basins area of southeast Nebraska and northeast Kansas hurts downstream drinking water quality. Much of the water from these basins drains into Tuttle Creek Reservoir, a major drinking water source for Kansas City, Topeka, and other Kansas communities. A joint NU and Kansas State University research and extension effort aims to protect these water supplies. NU researchers are using

computers to model herbicide application and use in the 9,700-square-mile Blue River Basins area. The team collected atrazine runoff data for four years and loaded it into a computer model designed to evaluate atrazine losses from three common tillage practices. Early results indicate several tillage and management practices potentially could reduce average annual atrazine runoff by 50 percent or more. These findings are helping identify specific practices that could reduce herbicide runoff and improve and protect drinking water.

•When a devastating October snowstorm destroyed and damaged thousands of trees in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa in 1997, the Branching Out Tree Care Program coalition provided information and help on tree damage assessment and pruning. The program's longer-term goals are continued replanting and tree education, such as promoting tree health and care of newly planted trees, to thousands of newly interested Nebraska and Iowa residents. The Branching Out coalition, coordinated by Cooperative Extension and assisted by the Omaha World-Herald's \$1 million donation, helped purchase, provide and plant nearly 400,000 trees in the Omaha-Douglas County metro area and established an Urban Forest project to plant 50,000 trees annually for three years. Surveys documented high levels of learning among people participating in Branching Out workshops.

**You may access the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Home Page
with the following address:**

<http://www.ianr.unl.edu/ianr/coopext/coopext.htm>



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